

The Clan Call

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"LET'S BE FRIENDS!"

Synopsis—Young Carlie Wilburton Dale, or "Bill Dale," son of a wealthy coal operator, John K. Dale, arrives at the Halfway Switch, in eastern Tennessee, abandoning a life of idle ease—and incidentally a bride, Patricia Clavering, at the altar—determined to make his own way in life. He meets "Babe" Littleford, typical mountaineer girl. "By" Heck, a character of the hills, takes him to John Moreland's home. Moreland is chief of his "clan," which has an old feud with the Littlefords. He tells Dale of the killing of his brother, David Moreland, years ago, owner of rich coal deposits, by a man named Carlie. Dale believes the man was his father. Dale makes his home with the Morelands. Talking with Babe, Dale is ordered by "Black Adam" Ball to leave "his girl" alone. Dale whips the bully. He arranges with John Moreland to develop the coal deposits. Ben Littleford sends a challenge to John Moreland to meet him with his followers in battle. Moreland agrees. The two clans line up for battle. A Littleford fires the first shot. Babe, in an effort to stop the fighting, comes to the Moreland side of the river, and is accidentally shot by her father and seriously wounded. The fight stops and Babe is taken to the city. Doctors announce she is not seriously hurt. Dale meets an old friend, Bobby McLaurin, who has married Patricia Clavering. Dale's father admits he killed David Moreland and offers him funds to develop the coal. Dale declines and gets funds elsewhere. He realizes he loves Babe, who goes to live with Patricia to be educated. Henderson Goff, a coal man, appears on the scene.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

He didn't wait for a reply, but turned away with By Heck. He went to the home of the Hecks ostensibly to have his fortune told—really, to get his dinner. The old woman didn't like him, but her inborn spirit of hospitality wouldn't permit her to refuse him a meal. She felt that she was almost even with him when, after shuffling and reading the cards, she told him that it would be wise for him to look out for a big, tall, grey-eyed young man with an oak tree in one hand and a couple of cliffs in the other.

Dale told Major Bradley and John Moreland of that which Goff had said to him at the gate. The major suggested forthwith that he go to meet the man; it couldn't possibly do any harm, and there was a chance that he would learn something of Goff's intentions.

So Dale went. Goff was already there, waiting. He was sitting on a stone on the Moreland side of the river, whittling idly. When he saw Dale approaching, he smiled and nodded, rose and pocketed his knife.

"I want to make you an offer for that coal," he said at once. "All right," Dale replied. "If your offer is big enough, it will be considered. But no shyster price is going to get that coal, Goff."

Goff frowned uneasily.

"You don't know coal, Mr. Dale. You don't know the business of mining—or I've got you sized up wrong. Thousands of men have gone busted trying to do things they weren't used to doing. There's a big chance, too, that the coal isn't what it looks to be on the surface. You'd better take a sure thing, and avoid a possibility of loss. I'll give you five thousand, spot cash, for that coal."

Dale shook his head. "You'll have to come heavier than that, y'know, if you get the Moreland coal."

"And an extra thousand for yourself!"

Dale laughed a low, queer laugh. "You amuse me, Goff," said he. "Seems to me you've missed your calling in life. What a peach of a king-villain you'd make in melodrama! You wouldn't have to act, either; you'd have to be just your natural self. And you make me mad, too, Goff. Because I'm on the square with the Morelands and everybody else—now, get that!"

The corners of the shyster coal man's mouth came down.

"Oh, bosh—don't pass me that virtue stuff. Every man has his price, high or low. You've got yours, and I've got mine. I'll give you five thousand, spot cash, if you'll persuade John Moreland to sell to me for five thousand, and nobody'll ever know you got a rakedown from me. It's all the coal is worth, that ten thousand. Well, yes?"

Dale was of the type that goes pale with anger, and he was pale now. He clenched his hands.

"You can't insult me like that and get away with it, Goff," he clipped. "We're going to fight, Goff, and I'm going to put a licking on you that fifteen horses can't pull off. Get me!"

He threw aside his coat and rolled his sleeves to his elbows. Henderson Goff ran his right hand quickly to a rear trouser pocket and brought back a stub-nosed automatic pistol, which he turned threateningly toward Bill Dale.

"Go easy, friend," Goff said very complacently. "There's no use in getting sore. I want the coal, that's all. If I can't get it by fair means, I'll get it in another way. Oh, I don't mind telling you; one man's oath is as good in court as another man's. If you don't take me up at ten thousand, I'll give you so much trouble that you'll be glad to sell it to me later for half that amount. The Balls think they own a big interest in that coal! There's a lot of them, too, and they can keep you from working the mine. Well, I can't waste time in dickering with you. What do you say?"

"I say," and Dale smiled an odd little smile, "that your plan appears to be perfect, except that you've overlooked one or two important details. For instance, there's the law, y'know."

"The law—now don't go and fool yourself!" exclaimed Goff. "The state couldn't afford to keep a hundred men here, month in and month out, just to protect your little mine. My patience is about gone, Dale—for the last time, what do you say?"

"I say that I'll beat you at any game you put up against me," very quietly. "Furthermore, I say that you are a coward and a scoundrel, and that you haven't got the insides in you



And He Began to Raise the Wicked. Looking Pistol As Though He Meant to Fire.

to fight me a fair man's fight. If you'll only pocket that thing you've got in your hand, I'll mow down half an acre of meadow bush with your body."

The other turned red, then white, then red again. Bill Dale's words had lashed him keenly. His eyes became like hard black beads, and he began to raise the wicked-looking pistol as though he meant to fire.

Then there was the sound of a breaking twig behind him, and a voice drawled out:

"Drop it, Mister—drop the funny little gun, or the middle o' Tarment is yore pot'ion right now!"

It was the moonshiner, By Heck, and his rifle was leveled. Goff dropped the pistol. Heck grinned, advanced slowly, took up the weapon that the hillfolk call a "coward's gun" and tossed it into the river.

"Now git—cut the mustard—light a rag away from here," he ordered, "before I let Bill Dale loose on ye!"

Goff went away rapidly.

"I wonder if you heard him say anything that would make you valuable as a witness," muttered Dale, "in the event we want to have him arrested?"

"I heard you tell him 'at he was afeard to fight ye a fair man's fight, and 'at ef he'd pocket that thing he held in his hand ye'd mow down twenty acres o' meadow bush with his low-down body—that'd be vallyable in co'te wouldn't it?"

Dale smiled. Then he frowned.

CHAPTER IX.

A Signal Victory.

The mining man Hayes, the major and John Moreland were waiting at the gate when Dale, accompanied by the moonshiner, returned to the cabin. Dale was the first to speak. He told briefly of that which had taken place at the blown-down sycamore, and at the last of it By Heck straightened proudly.

"I be dajfimed ef I hadn't ha' pumped him so full o' lead 'at the couldn't enough o' men got around him to tote off his corpse, ef he hadn't ha' dropped the coward's gun." By Heck declared as fiercely as he could. "Cause maw shee seed in the cup 'at Bill Dale was a-goin' to be a right picktickle friend o' mine, I god, and I has a habit o' takin' keer o' my friends. Now that was my Uncle Bill, him what could jump a sixteen-rail fence."

"It was a nine-rail fence, By," impatiently cut in John Moreland. "You've done told that so much 'at it's dang nigh wore out. S'posed ye go back thar to the orchard shind o' the house and see what Cale and Luke's a-doin'; hey, By?"

Heck nodded and went toward the orchard. He knew they didn't want him to overhear what they were going to say, but it didn't offend him. It wasn't easy to offend the good-natured Heck.

Moreland turned to Dale. "Well?"

Dale turned to Hayes. "We're going to begin the building of the little railroad at the earliest possible moment. And because I don't know anything about the work, I'm going to ask you to take the lead. Now, there may be some fighting. I don't want you to go into this thing blindly, you see. If you're going to withdraw at all, do it now."

"I'm not a stranger to fighting," Hayes replied amiably. "I've been through half a dozen coal strikes. I think you may count on me, Mr. Dale."

"Then lay out a plan for immediate action."

"To suggest," acquiesced Hayes, "that we send to the little town in the lowland for a supply of picks and shovels, axes and saws, hammers, drills, and explosives. In the meantime, you and I can stake out the way for the track."

It sounded businesslike, Dale thought.

Within the hour John Moreland and his son Caleb started for Cartersville on foot, and in the older man's pocket was money sufficient to buy the things that were needed.

Dale and Hayes set out for the north end of David Moreland's mountain, and each of them carried a hand-axe for making stakes.

It was not often that the quiet Hayes permitted himself to go into raptures over anything; however, he went into raptures over the Moreland coal. It was, he declared, one of the best propositions he had ever seen. It was no wonder that Henderson Goff was determined to get possession of it, he said.

Then they went to work.

By sundown two days later they had chosen the route for the narrow-gauge railroad and set stakes accordingly. Hayes told his general manager 'Nat with a good force of men the last rail could be put down within two months.

During those two days they had several times seen Henderson Goff in company with Black Adam Ball and some of his relatives. Once they had come upon Goff talking earnestly with Saul Littleford, the big, bearded, gaunt brother of the Littleford chief. Hayes reminded Dale of this, and said to him further:

"Goff will have the Littlefords on his side the first thing you know! Maybe some of the Littlefords, as well as some of the Balls, knew about this coal before David Moreland got his mountain by state's grant at a few cents per acre. If you'll take my advice, Mr. Dale, you'll make friends of these two sets just as quick as you can."

Dale thrust his hand-axe inside his belt and turned to the mining expert.

"If you know, I was thinking of that same thing when you spoke," he replied. "And I believe I can manage it, now that Miss Littleford's accidental wounding has given the old feud such a big blow. I'm fairly sure I can manage it so far as Ben Littleford is concerned; it's John that's going to be hard to bring to taw. He should be home this evening, if he's had good luck, and I'll tackle him as soon as he comes."

Together they started across David Moreland's mountain, walking rapidly, with Dale leading.

Darkness came down on them when they had covered half the distance. The great hemlocks and poplars loomed spectral and gaunt in the early starlight. The almost impenetrable thickets of laurel and ivy whispered uncanny things, and their seas of pink and snowy bloom looked somehow ghostly. Now and then there was the pattering of some little animal's feet on the dry, hard leaves of bygone years. A solitary brown owl poured out its heart in weird and melancholy cries to the night it loved. There was the faint, far-off baying of a hound, and the soft swish of a night hawk's wings.

Men from the core of civilization must feel these things of the wilderness.

Suddenly Dale drew back and stood still. In the trail ahead, standing as motionless as the trees about him, was the tall figure of a man. It was almost as though he were there to bar the way.

The two went on slowly. The figure didn't move. Dale spoke, and the form came to life. It was By Heck; he was leaning on the muzzle of his rifle.

"It's you, is it, Bill, old boy?" He yawned sluggishly. "I was a-waitin' here for you. I reckon I must ha' went to sleep a-standin' here on my feet! I've got news, Bill."

"Out with it."

"I've been a-trailin' Henderson Goff all day," Heck said in guarded tones. "He's shore got them lowdown Balls

to believin' they're already millionaires."

"I knew that," said Dale. "That's not news."

"But that ain't all," By Heck went on. "Goff's got Saul Littleford, too—lock, stock, bar! and sights. He owns Saul jest the same as I own my old spotted 'coon dawg Dime. Saul he gits him a job a-bein' mine boss, and what other Littlefords 'at will stick gits jobs a-diggin' the black d'mount at two dollars a day. Asides, all of 'em is to have a big lot o' money when the dividin'-up time comes, says Goff."

"Much obliged to you, By," Dale acknowledged. "Let's go; 'bout face, By! I'm goin' to tie a hard knot in that villainous game of Henderson Goff's."

They reached John Moreland's cabin less than an hour later. Moreland and his son had just returned from Cartersville, and Dale learned through Hayes that the two hillmen had shown good judgment and some business sense in making their purchases.

When the evening meal was over Dale drew John Moreland out to the cabin yard, where the many old-fashioned flowers made the night air sweet with their blended odors. For a moment Dale stood looking toward the very bright stars and thinking; then he told the big man at his side of Goff's plan concerning the Littlefords, and strongly urged the making of friendship between the two clans.

"The snake!" mumbled John Moreland.

He appeared to be worried about it. He folded his arms, walked to the gate and back to Dale without uttering another word. It was hard for him to throw down completely the hatred of years upon years. Had it been any other person than Bill Dale, a fighter after his own heart, who had asked it, he never would have even considered it; he would have said quickly:

"We'll thrash the Balls and the Littlefords, too!"

The younger man read something of the other's thoughts.

"With the help of the law," said he, "we might whip them all. But it would mean a great deal of bloodshed at best. The Littlefords are Babe's people, y'know. I like Babe. You like her, too, or you never would have gone with her to the hospital—now don't you?"

"I reckon I can't deny," the Moreland leader muttered, "at I like Babe Littleford. She ain't like none o' the rest of 'em, Bill."

Dale went on:

"All there is to do to enlist the Littlefords on our side is this: you go to old Ben and say to him: 'Let's begin anew; let's be friends, your people and my people, you and me.' He'll be glad you did it. Then it will be easy sailing for us. The Balls never would dare to attack such a force as the Morelands and the Littlefords combined. Don't you see? I admit it will be something of a sacrifice on your part. But a man like you can make sacrifices. Any man who is big enough to go down on his knees and ask the blessing of the Almighty on his enemies is big enough to make sacrifice. Come—let's go over and see Ben Littleford now; won't you?"

The mountaineer didn't answer.

"You won't throttle the cause born in David Moreland's good heart on account of a little personal pride—"

He arose, took up the lamp, walked to the front door and opened it, and called into the night:

"Won't ye come in, John?"

"I reckon I will, Ben," was the lazy answer. "Fo' a minute, anyhow. But I reckon I can't stay long."

Moreland followed Littleford into the best room. Littleford put the lamp beside the worn leather-bound Bible on the table, and they sat down. They looked steadily at each other, and Dale saw plainly that both were ill at ease. Surely, thought Moreland, he had done a great deal when he had come into his old enemy's house. Surely, thought Littleford, he had done a great deal when he had asked John Moreland into his home.

"You wonderful place, my own country."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"Code of Hammurabi."

The "Code of Hammurabi," a set of laws made by King Hammurabi of Babylon, 1858-1816 B. C., was found in 1901 A. D. in a stone eight feet high. The code contains 280 sections dealing with all sorts of questions. The law of bribery was stated thus: "If a man bear witness in a case for gain or money he shall himself bear the penalty imposed in the case." Breaking into mud brick houses was punishable by death. The old law of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was enunciated by him long before the same law was stated by the Hebrews in the old Mosaic law.

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A Mississippi Case

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